






Naill, Edward D.

1871  
20





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
State of Indiana through the Indiana State Library



7-683

REMINISCENCES  
OF THE  
LAST YEAR OF  
PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S LIFE.

BY CHAPLAIN EDWARD D. NEILL.

READ AT A MEETING OF THE

MINNESOTA COMMANDERY

OF THE

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION,

ST. PAUL, MINN., Nov. 4, 1885.

---

ST. PAUL, MINN.:  
THE PIONEER PRESS COMPANY.  
1885.





REMINISCENCES  
OF THE  
LAST YEAR OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S LIFE.

---

By CHAPLAIN EDWARD D. NEILL.

---

*Read at the meeting of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion, State of Minnesota, on  
Nov. 4, 1885, at St. Paul, Minn.*

One of the most intelligent and extensive manufacturers of Dublin, whose father, at the time, was a representative of that city in the British Parliament, after the transaction of some business in the American consulate, said to me: "Now, tell me something about President Lincoln."

The remark was not singular, but expressed the desire which, after the war, prevailed in all the countries of Europe, to know more of him who has left a name which the world will not "willingly let die."

The paper which has been prepared is not an elaborate essay, nor will it betray any confidence, nor will it cherish partisanship, but will only give a few reminiscences of President Lincoln, who, in virtue of his office, was commander-in-chief of that army and navy, many of whose officers are now members of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

On the twenty-first of June, 1861, the First Minnesota Infantry Regiment, amid the cheers and tears of hundreds, embarked in steamboats, from Jackson Street, in the city of St. Paul, for the valley of the Potomac River. The next week the regiment was encamped on

vacant squares east of the capitol in Washington, and one day, in the morning papers, it was announced that, in the afternoon, the president would assist in raising a flag on the grounds south of his residence; and, never having seen Mr. Lincoln, I went there with some other officers of the regiment. The crowd was very great. On the balcony of the president's house sat Gen. Scott, in full uniform, looking as majestic as old Jupiter of the ancient sculptors; while on a temporary platform around the flagstaff stood the president, ready to pull at a given signal. Among the spectators, directly before me, stood a man plainly dressed, with serious countenance, with his wife by his side, who was then known as Gov. Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee. Several years after, Mr. Johnson, referring to this occasion, said an occurrence took place which the superstitious would have considered an ill omen. He told me the president pulled the rope too long, so that the bunting of the flag was split, and he could but think at the time that he might be pained by the calamity of the great republic rent in twain, permanently.

President Lincoln was not again seen by me until after the First Minnesota Regiment had the fiery trials at Bull Run, Fair Oaks, and the Seven Days' battles terminating on Malvern Hill. Early in July, 1862, while the Army of the Potomac was resting around Harrison's Landing, on the James River, impelled by patriotism and impressed by the gravity of the situation, he came down to look Gen. McClellan in the face, and aid him to the extent of his power.

Attracted by cheering, I looked in the direction from which it came, and saw two horsemen. One had short legs, but a fine body and presence above the hips, and was on a large horse, in military dress. It was Gen. McClellan. The other, six feet four inches in height, upon a smaller horse, so that his feet seemed very near the ground, dressed as a civilian, with a tall, silk hat, was Abraham Lincoln. As he rode in front of the army the shouts of thousands of weary men showed that his presence had cheered them; yet no soldier who saw him that day, looking so much like the typical Brother Jonathan of the caricatures, can ever forget the scene.

Early in 1864 I was appointed to read and dispose of all letters addressed to President Lincoln, and commissioned as secretary to sign land patents. A mail bag was brought to my room at the president's mansion, twice a day, well filled with letters upon various subjects.

Every month my impression of the greatness of President Lincoln increased. He was above a life of mere routine. In his bearing there was nothing artificial or mechanical. While he desired to be appreciated, and estimated the honors conferred upon him, he was never puffed up, nor used great, swelling words. In conversation I never knew him to speak of himself as president, but when necessary to allude to his position, he would use circumlocution and say, "Before I came here," or something equivalent. He was independent of all cliques. Willing to be convinced, with a wonderful patience he listened to the opinions and criticisms of others. Those whose opinions were not accepted would sometimes charge that he was under the thumb of this or that man, but the sequel always proved that he was not a party tool. While he did not frown, nor stamp his feet, while he eschewed the language of the Janus-faced diplomat, and was slow to reach a conclusion, yet when an opinion was deliberately formed he was as firm as a rock. At critical periods he was prompt to assume responsibility.

#### HIS TRIP TO FORTRESS MONROE.

On the morning of the second of February, 1865, between nine and ten o'clock, as I was ascending the stairs to the second story, to reach my room, I met Forbes, an intelligent servant, descending with a small valise in his hand, and I asked, "Where are you going?" Looking up to see that no one was near, he whispered, "Fortress Monroe," and hurried on. When I reached the upper hall I met the president with his overcoat, and going to my room looked out of the window and saw him quietly walking around the curved pavement which leads to Pennsylvania Avenue, while Forbes was following at a distance of two or three hundred feet, as his valet. Waiting for some time I then crossed the hall to the room of the principal secretary, Mr. John G. Nicolay, and quietly said, "The president has left the city." "What do you mean?" he asked; and I replied, "Just what I have said." Rising quickly, he opened the door which communicated with the president's room, and was astonished to find the chair of Mr. Lincoln vacant. The president had received a dispatch which convinced him that it was proper to go to Fortress Monroe and confer with the rebel commissioners, Alexander Stephens, R. M. T. Hunter

and J. A. Campbell, and at nine o'clock that morning sent the following telegram to Secretary Seward, already there: "Induced by a dispatch from Gen. Grant, I join you at Fortress Monroe."

The failure of this conference to restore peace has become a part of our history, and upon it it is unnecessary to dwell. Upon the return of the president, Forbes told me that the rebel commissioners seemed to be very friendly, and that after they returned to the steamboat which was to take them back, to the vicinity of Richmond, a negro was sent in a row boat by Mr. Seward with a basket of champagne, to be presented with his compliments. After the man reached the deck the commissioners read the note and waved their handkerchiefs in acknowledgment, and then Mr. Seward, speaking through a boatswain's trumpet said: "Keep the champagne, but return the negro." The status of the negro, in case of a cessation of hostilities, had been one of the subjects discussed in the conference.

#### A GREAT WORKER.

The president's capacity for work was wonderful. While other men were taking recreation through the sultry months of summer he remained in his office attending to the wants of the nation. He was never an idler or a loungeur. Each hour he was busy. At the election in November, 1864, he was chosen president for a second term. Anxious to know the returns from the several states the morning after the election, I came to the mansion earlier than usual. As I passed the door of his office, which was ajar, I saw that he was at his table and engaged in official work. Entering the room, I took a seat by his side, extended my hand and congratulated him upon the vote, for my country's sake, and for his own sake. Turning away from the papers which had been occupying his attention, he spoke kindly of his competitor, the calm, prudent general and great organizer, whose remains this week have been placed in the cold grave. He told me that Gen. Scott had recommended McClellan as an officer who had studied the science of war, and had been in the Crimea during the war against Russia, and that he told Scott that he knew nothing about the science of war, and it was very important to have just such a person to organize the raw recruits of the republic around Washington.

In June, 1864, he was persuaded to attend a great fair in Philadelphia, under the auspices of the Sanitary Commission, and returned one morning about ten o'clock. As official business had accumulated during his absence, as soon as he entered the house he went immediately to his office. In less than an hour I went to see him, and found him stretched out, his head on the back of one chair, his legs resting on another, his collar and cravat on the table, a mulatto barber lathering his face, while the attorney general, Edward Bates, was quietly seated by his side, talking to him upon some matter of state. It was a striking illustration of his desire to be at work. To the question whether his visit was pleasant, he replied that it was, and the ladies, he believed, had made several thousand dollars by placing him on exhibition.

His memory was very retentive. During the last year of the war a convalescent soldier at Elmira Hospital, New York, while strolling with a fellow soldier, administered some drug to him and robbed him. From the effect of the drugging the plundered man died, and the robber was tried by court martial and sentenced to be hung. His friends obtained a suspension of sentence on the ground that he was insane. The testimony in the case was sent to a physician the superintendent of a lunatic asylum, and his opinion requested. In due time the doctor's report, covering several foolscap pages, was received by mail, and, after being read and indorsed, was sent to the president.

Some weeks after, Gen. James A. Hardie, the assistant adjutant general at the war department, came to my room, and said it was very desirable that the president should take some action relative to the soldier whose sentence had been suspended. Going to the president I told him Gen. Hardie wanted to know about this soldier's papers. Pointing to the top of his desk he merely replied: "There they are; tell him they are still in soak." Hardie, quite chagrined by the unsatisfactory answer, hurried off. In about two weeks he came again and said: "The soldier ought to be hung or pardoned; will you again see the president?" I did as asked, and then the president inquired if I had read the report which came from the doctor. I answered that I had. Then rising, he went to a case filled with papers, and without the slightest difficulty found the report and read its last sentence which was to this effect: "Although I cannot pronounce the person insane, he certainly is peculiar." "Now," he said, "if these last words

had not been written I should have had no hesitation in disposing of this case." Life to him was sacred, and he never would sign a paper that would take away life without deliberation.

As a writer he was fluent and forcible. His papers bore few marks of revision, and while his style was not Ciceronian, it was clear, pure and easily comprehended. He composed letters amid distractions which would have appalled other men. He kept no formal letter book. One morning in April, 1864, he came to me with a letter in his hand and said:

"Perhaps it is well to make a copy. Do so, and send the copy or the original, as you prefer, to the person to whom addressed."

It was his well-known letter to A. G. Hodges, of Frankfort, Ky., in which he gave the substance of his conversation with Gov. Bramlette. The opening sentences were:

"I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel, and yet I have never understood that the presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling. It was in the oath that I took that I would, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath. Nor was it in my view that I might take an oath to get power, and break the oath in using the power."

In February, 1865, he brought me several notes, and said they were the correspondence growing out of the visit of the senior Francis P. Blair to Richmond, and asked if I would arrange and connect them with red tape, so that he could show them to friends. The first was simply a visiting card, on which, directed to no person, was this brief note:

"Allow the bearer, F. P. Blair, Sr., to pass our lines, go South and return.

A. LINCOLN."

There was also a letter from Mr. Jefferson Davis to Mr. Blair. Mr. Davis in spelling the word negotiation used a "c" in place of the first "t," which is unusual.

## PERSONAL TRAITS.

President Lincoln's accessibility won the hearts of the people. No one was too poor to be received. When more important business was attended to, on some days, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, he would have his door thrown open, and all in the hall were allowed to enter and prefer their requests. He playfully called it "the Beggars' Opera."

Mr. Cameron, his first secretary of war, told me he came once while a reception of this kind was being held, and he wondered at the humor, patience, and versatility of Mr. Lincoln.

One woman tried to obtain an order upon the commissary at Washington for provisions for her family, on the ground that her husband was a soldier, and was with difficulty convinced that the president could not undertake to feed the families which soldiers had left behind them.

A Gascon in spirit, with imperfect use of the English language, in turn, approached the president, with a large bundle of papers, and the pompous announcement that he spoke six languages, and wished an appointment as consul to some foreign country. With infinite tact he told the persistent man to take the papers to the secretary of state, and if he would send a commission he would sign it. The sanguine fellow, not dwelling upon the import of that little word "if," left, blessing the president for his goodness and promptness.

At length, Mr. Cameron told me, when comparatively few were left in the room, a young man, who evidently had never been far from the place in which he was born, stood before the president, and was greatly embarrassed. In search of a paper he wished to present he put his hand into his side pocket but could not find it; then he began to feel his overcoat pockets, and became more confused. The president waited patiently, and at last, with a pleasant look, remarked: "Friends, you will remember that, some time ago, a man stood here who told us he could speak six languages, and now we have one who does not seem able to speak a word." By this time the young man found his paper, and consequently recovered his self-possession. His application was within the power of the president to grant, and the applicant left rejoicing.

Mr. Lincoln's manners were never repulsive. While he could not

grace a ball room, nor compete with the perfumed and spangled representative of a foreign court in a knowledge of the laws of fashion, yet in his heart there was always kindly feeling for others; and thus, in the best sense, he was a gentleman. The late Edward Everett, whose elegance and courtliness of manner no one questioned, met Mr. Lincoln for the first time at the dinner table of a friend on the occasion of the dedication of the national cemetery at Gettysburg, and he afterwards said that he was impressed with his simple, easy bearing. Destitute of hauteur, and conscious of wishing no man any harm, he had from youth indulged in pleasantries, by telling to farmers at the country store, and to fellow lawyers while going to court, amusing if not always classic stories, not to raise a laugh, but to illustrate his views. This habit remained through life, but no fair-minded man would have called him a trifling jester or a coarse buffoon. It was a relief to him, amid the cares of civil war, to indulge in quaint expressions. One day an elderly gentleman, who wished to give a house as a home for soldiers' orphans, visited him and said "Secretary Stanton was not kind and would not listen to him." A messenger came and said the president wished to see me. When I entered he wrote on a visiting card, "Will the secretary of war please see the gentleman?" and asked me if I would go with the note, in person, to the war department. Gen. Hardie, when I met him, seemed displeased as he looked at the gentleman, but I told him I had been sent with a note from the president. Hastily taking the card, he went to the secretary's room, but soon came out, and curtly said, "The secretary cannot see the gentleman." Persuading the person to go back to the hotel and leave the city until the times were more propitious, I went to the president, showed him the card, and said it had failed to accomplish what was desired. With a look full of humor, he said: "Well! well! the requests of the commander-in-chief don't amount to much."

One morning he told his doorkeeper that he would not be interrupted, as he was much engaged. Senator Howard, of Michigan, came and said he must see him. The doorkeeper could not disobey orders, and brought him to me. As soon as he sat down, he showed that he was in ill humor, and said: "If it were his own son he would not act so." Never having seen the senator, and supposing him to be some agent to procure substitutes, I replied that if he continued to speak disrespectfully of the president, in his own house, I must



request him to leave my room. He then said that he was Senator Howard, and that he had come to request suspension of sentence of a soldier who, in a few hours, was to be executed.

Entering the president's room, I found him very busy in writing, and apologetically said: "Would not have interrupted you, but Senator Howard wants suspension in a certain case." "Wants suspension! Well, that is a queer request." Afterwards he told me to write a telegram, giving the soldier's name, ordering suspension of sentence, sign his name, and send it, through the war department. I told him I would write the order, but preferred that he should sign it.

A drunken black man of a low grade of intellect killed some one with an axe, in the suburbs of Washington, and was sentenced to be hung. A question arose as to whether it was the duty of the marshal of the district, or some one else, to attend to the execution. Early one morning I saw the president in Secretary Nicolay's room, and, as he was not there, I asked if I could do anything. He replied, "There is a dispute as to the hanging of a black man, and I have determined to settle the controversy by not having him hung, and I would like to see Marshal Lamon."

A commutation of sentence to imprisonment for life was prepared, and Marshal Lamon reached the scaffold as the rope was being fastened around the culprit's neck, and it took some time for the city authorities, and a longer time for the dull-headed negro, to comprehend that there was to be no hanging, and that the paper read by the marshal was a commutation by President Lincoln.

#### HIS MAGNANIMITY.

The president cultivated no animosities, and for the public good would sometimes appoint those who criticized his acts. Maj. John Hay, the unmarried secretary, one day said to me: "What do you think Mr. Lincoln has done?" Then he told me that he had just nominated Salmon P. Chase as the chief justice of the supreme court. It was an act of magnanimity, as Mr. Chase had been willing to see him defeated, and had aided in the circulation of a pamphlet giving reasons why he should not be nominated a second time for the presidency. While Mr. Lincoln was dead and yet unburied, in examining his papers, I found a letter from Mr. Simeon Draper, written as early

as 1862, in which he mentioned that Chief Justice Taney had reached so great an age that his days on earth would be few, and that when his death occurred he hoped Mr. Chase would be his successor.

From the first there was accord between Gen. Grant and the president. In the October number of the *Century Magazine* it is mentioned that after the surrender of Vicksburg the president sent for J. Russell Jones, who had been a merchant in Galena, to visit Washington, and after his arrival said: "I have sent for you, Mr. Jones, to know if that man Grant wants to be president." The response was: "No, I have just come from Vicksburg, and I know he wants you re-elected." Then said Mr. Lincoln: "You have lifted a great weight from my mind, and done me an immense amount of good, for I tell you, my friend, no man knows how deeply that presidential grub gnaws till he has had it himself."

The president knew that there were those in his cabinet and in the army willing to take his seat. Letters had been received mentioning that one of Gen. B. F. Butler's staff officers was visiting in the West, and whispering that the general was willing to be president. Mr. Chase was too willing to be his successor. No wonder it was a relief to know that Gen. Grant had no aspirations in that direction.

About two o'clock in the afternoon of the ninth of March, 1864, a messenger told me to look out of the window of my room and I would see Gen. Grant. I went and saw a plain, round-shouldered man in citizen's dress, with a lad, his eldest son, by his side, walking away from the house, where he had been to pay his first visit to the president. To gratify the public and appease the reporters, the president wrote the few words which he had spoken when he gave the general his commission upon a piece of paper, partly torn, and Grant penned a brief reply.

During the latter part of 1864, Grant sent a telegram to this effect, indicating his pertinacity: "It seems to me that a call should be issued for more men, but in any event I shall continue and do the best with those I have left."

Early in the spring of 1865 the president sent a telegram to Gen. Grant, as follows: "The financial pressure is so great, I hope that you will make an early move and close the war."

Full of anxiety, Mr. Lincoln went to the front during the last days of March, and a movement was begun under Gen. Sheridan. On the

second of April Richmond was evacuated and on the ninth Gen. Lee surrendered.

The president did not exult when there was a victory nor manifest depression when circumstances were adverse.

After our arms had been successful guns were fired in honor of the victory in the public square in front of the mansion. Although the concussion would cause the windows to rattle, he never made allusion to the salutes. He felt that war in any aspect was deplorable, and that one victory did not conquer a peace. Nor was he disturbed when there was an appearance of danger.

During the summer of 1864 I lived in the country thirteen miles from the city, near the junction of the Baltimore and Washington turnpike with the railroad. After breakfast, on Tuesday, July 12th, I went, as usual, in a railway car to the city, and before noon my house was surrounded by Gen. Bradley Johnson's insurgent cavalry, who had made an attempt to capture the New York express train, and robbed the country store near by of its contents. The presence of the enemy stopped all travel by railroad, and Senator Ramsey, of Minnesota, who happened to be in Washington, found no way to the North except by descending the Potomac to its mouth and then ascending Chesapeake Bay to the city of Baltimore. While the cavalry were in the fields around my house the enemy's infantry was marching toward the capital, by what was called the Seventh Street road, and they set fire to the residence of the Hon. Montgomery Blair, who had been postmaster general. As I sat in my room at the president's, the smoke of the burning mansion was visible, but business was transacted with as much quietness as if the foe were hundreds of miles distant. Mr. Fox, the assistant secretary of the navy, had, in a private note, informed the president that if there was any necessity to leave the city, he would find a steamer in readiness at the wharf at the foot of Sixth Street.

About one o'clock of the afternoon of each day of the skirmishing, the president would enter his carriage and drive to the forts in the suburbs, and watch the soldiers repulse the invaders.

#### CURIOUS CORRESPONDENCE.

The letters sent to the president from day to day were of all descriptions,

“From grave to gay, from lively to severe.”

A rude wag, the day after his election for a second term, wrote: "Dear Old Abe: Yesterday I worked hard for you all day, and wore out my boots. Please send a new pair by mail." After the surrender of Gen. Lee, ropes began to arrive by express, with humorous notes, requesting that they might be used in hanging the late president of the insurgent states upon "a sour apple tree."

A cheery woman from distant Oregon wrote that the health of her husband had failed, and that it would be a great assistance if he were made postmaster. She continued:

"By the name I bear since my marriage you will not know me, but you will when I tell you that I am Deacon ——'s daughter, at whose house you used to stop in going to court, and you may remember that once, after sewing a button on your coat, you laughingly said, 'I will not forget you when I'm president;' and on another occasion when my father was making preparation for his quite lengthy evening family prayer, you whispered, "Go up stairs and bring down a pillow for me, for I am afraid my knees will become sore."

While some letters provoked a smile, others stirred the higher emotions. A sister of the rebel general called Stonewall Jackson, told her joy at seeing the Union troops around her farm in Virginia, and how gladly she looked upon the flag of the Republic, and the blue uniforms of the officers.

A boy not twenty years of age unfolded a tale of sorrow. He wrote that an elder brother had enlisted, and for some reason had left his regiment, and was marked as a deserter. His parents in consequence were humiliated and heart-broken, and he feared that their days on earth would be shortened in consequence of that word affixed to their son's name. He then begged that the government would take him and allow him to serve the full term of his brother's enlistment, on condition that his brother would be absolved.

A letter once came from Canada, every line of which seemed to be the moan of a burdened conscience. The writer told how he had been skulking for months, as a deserter, but that within a short time he had been attending church, had repented and determined to lead a new life. From the hour he had changed his course, although friends dissuaded him, he felt impelled to write to the president, and mention that on a certain day, and at a certain hour, he would be seen walking in the grounds around the mansion, clothed in a certain man-

ner. A messenger was told to be on the watch, and at the time specified he came to my room and said: "The man with the specified overcoat is there." He was then brought up to my room. He had the emaciated face of one who had experienced mental suffering, and willing, if necessary, to die for his transgression. While he waited, his letter was sent and explained to the president, who wrote on the back to this effect: "Let this man be returned to his regiment without penalty, except that he shall serve, after the expiration of his term of enlistment, the number of days he was absent by desertion."

Time fails me to relate all that I could, and I will now confine myself to incidents in connection with the last days of the earthly career of this remarkable man.

On Monday, the ninth of April, 1865, the citizens of Washington were full of joy at the intelligence of the surrender of Gen. Lee, and began to throng around the presidential mansion. On Tuesday morning a procession, with a band of music, arrived while I was conversing with the president, who told the messenger to tell them he would address them that evening. On that night he delivered his last public address, "not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart," as the opening sentence indicated. At this time Chief Justice Chase was holding court in Baltimore, and on Thursday a letter from him passed through my hands, objecting to some of the phraseology of the president in the address relative to the emancipation proclamation.

It was now evident that, while the war was ended, the work of building up confidence in the government, in the late slave states, would be herculean, requiring the "wisdom of a serpent and the gentleness of a dove."

On Thursday, I think, he mentioned that he wished to see Mr. John W. Forney, the secretary of the Senate, and also editor of the *Philadelphia Press* and the *Washington Chronicle*. Mr. Forney afterwards told me that he had conferred with him, and suggested that he should make an informal visit to Richmond and other cities of the South and urge upon editors and leading men the desirableness of their giving a full support to the measures of government. By this method he hoped that enough, at least, would be persuaded to rally around the flag, so as to obviate the necessity of appointing as postmasters, collectors of revenue and judges of courts those not natives of the

South, with no permanent interest in its welfare, who would leave as soon as the emoluments of office ceased. By this time those persons always ready to give advice began to call, and tell what they thought should be done with Mr. Jefferson Davis. Wearied and annoyed, he said to Slade, his mulatto doorkeeper:

“This talk about Mr. Davis tires me. I hope he will mount a fleet horse, reach the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, and drive so far into its waters that we shall never see him again.”

The last interview I had with him was between three and four o'clock of the last day of his earthly life. A colonel of a Vermont regiment, who had been on a furlough, during his absence from the Army of the Potomac, had been made a brigadier general. Upon his return he stopped at the war department for his commission, and was told that it had been sent over to the president for his signature. Coming to the president's house he told the doorkeeper of the office the occasion of his visit, and he was brought to me. That afternoon there had been a cabinet meeting and an interview with Gen. Grant, and I went to see the president and found that he had retired to the private part of the house for a lunch. While I was looking over the papers on his table to see if I could find the desired commission, he came back, eating an apple. I told him for what I was looking, and as I talked he placed his hand on the bell-pull, when I said: “For whom are you going to ring?” Placing his hand upon my coat, he spoke but two words: “Andrew Johnson.” Then I said, “I will come in again.” As I was leaving the room, the vice president had been ushered, and the president advanced and took him by the hand.

None but God knew then that an assassin was preparing plans by which the president, in a few hours, would be mortally wounded.

After ten o'clock on Friday morning Mrs. Lincoln sent a servant to my room to know whether any complimentary tickets had been received by me, inviting the president and family to attend that night, the play of the “American Cousin,” at Ford's Theatre. I replied “I had not,” and in less than an hour from that time a messenger was sent to the theatre to say that the president's family wished a box. It was not until after that hour that the assassin began to form his plans for that night.

Just at dawn on Saturday morning I was aroused from sleep by a loud pounding, and going down to the door of my country house

and opening it, found the sergeant of the guard at the railroad crossing, who told me that the president and his cabinet had been shot, that all travel on the road from Washington had been stopped, and then he burst into tears.

#### A PREVIOUS WARNING.

To me the surprise was not as great as it was to this loyal, tender-hearted soldier. Threatening letters had come to the president through the mails which did not, however, except in one instance, seem worthy of notice or preservation. That letter was post-marked Gloversville, New York, about forty miles northwest of Albany, during the latter part of February. The handwriting was not at all disguised, but clear and bold. The sentences were brief and those of a person terribly in earnest, and to this effect: "God knows I have hated you, but God knows I cannot be a murderer. Beware of the ides of March. Do not, like Julius Cæsar, go to the Senate unarmed. If I did not love my life I would sign my name."

The words made such an impression that I consulted with Maj. John Hay, the unmarried secretary, who slept at the mansion, and whose chamber adjoined my room. He remarked: "What can we do to prevent assassination? The president is so accessible that any villain can feign business, and while talking to him, draw a razor and cut his throat, and some minutes might elapse after the murderer's escape before we could discover what had been done."

This letter I did not destroy, but some weeks after Harold, Payne and others had been executed, I gave it to Judge Advocate General Holt, who subsequently told me that he had no doubt that the writer had some knowledge of Booth's desire to do evil. Who the writer was will probably never be known.

As no cars were allowed to run, upon the tender of a locomotive I rode to Washington, and reached the house about an hour after the president's body had arrived. A vast crowd was in the streets, a guard of soldiers at each gate, the halls of the mansion, ordinarily filled with visitors, were still, and everything seemed to weep. My position was lonely. Mr. John G. Nicolay, the principal secretary, was in Cuba; Maj. Hay, by the long watching through the night, was worn out, and lay upon the sofa in his chamber, so that the duty de-

volved upon me to read and dispose of all the papers that had accumulated in the office since Mr. Lincoln had been president, and make such disposition of them as my judgment suggested. Few men's papers can be found in this world so free from anything objectionable, or sentiments which it would be desirable the public should not know, as were these.

In the mail received after the president was lying cold with death, there were two which made some impression. One was from Gen. Burnside, resigning his position, thanking the president for the consideration he had always shown, and expressing his willingness, should the nation's life be again endangered, once more to buckle on his sword. The other was written by Chief Justice Chase, at Barnum's Hotel, Baltimore, on Friday night, not long before the fatal shot was fired. Mr. Chase had written on Wednesday relative to the emancipation proclamation, but this second letter was on the position the government should assume toward the late slave population, and in it was asked, "Cannot you take the position of universal suffrage?"

Mr. Lincoln preferred intelligent, impartial suffrage, without respect to color, but was willing to give the right to vote to all colored men who had been soldiers of the United States, even if they could not read.

On Saturday, Slade, the messenger, came to me and said he was very unhappy, and asked me if I had noticed as I crossed the hall to the president's room on Friday afternoon, that he was listening to the vice president and nodding assent, as he conversed. I told him I had observed him. He then said:

"It is what I said to Mr. Johnson that makes me feel miserable." The vice president had expressed his respect for Mr. Lincoln, but said he thought if he were president he would not make it too easy for the rebels, and that having African blood in his veins he had nodded assent, and expressed the wish that at some future day he might be president.

Assuring him that there was no occasion for his unhappiness, he seemed to be in a measure relieved. Slade was a faithful man, prudent and dignified. He was an elder in the Presbyterian Church for colored people on Fifteenth Street, near the president's mansion.

After the funeral he came to me in a different frame of mind, and told me the ambition of his life was satisfied, that President Johnson



had sent for him and made him the steward of the house, which gave him a good salary and some perquisites. He died before Mr. Johnson's term expired, and camellia japonicas were sent by the president to be placed on his coffin, and the president's daughters attended the burial services.

About ten o'clock on Saturday night, Maj. Hay, who had recovered, came to me and said that he thought some one ought to suggest to acting President Johnson that it would be well for him to inform the widow that there was no need of undue haste in leaving the mansion. Going to the National Hotel, I found Senator Ramsey, of Minnesota, in his private parlor, and asked him if he would see Mr. Johnson, to which request he consented. On Sunday morning, about eleven o'clock, the cards of Senators Ramsey and Norton were brought to me, and a messenger was sent to Robert, the eldest son of the dead president, who came and stood by the table where his father had so lately transacted business. After introducing the senators, Gov. Ramsey delivered the request of President Johnson, that his mother should not feel constrained to leave the house until she had made all proper arrangements.

This son had but a few months before graduated at Harvard University, and his manly bearing on that trying occasion made me feel that he was a worthy son of a worthy father. It is worthy of note that, in after years, he succeeded Senator Ramsey as secretary of war.

Just before the funeral, President Lincoln's first secretary of war, Simon Cameron, so long identified with the politics of Pennsylvania, and still living, told me that, during his long public career, he had never met one who was more sagacious and far-seeing.

Not long after the surrender of Richmond, a native of the South, now a professor in South Carolina, visited me and passed a night. In the chamber where he slept there were on the table some of the advance sheets of Raymond's "Life of Lincoln," which he had taken up and read. After taking his seat at the breakfast table, he said that he now believed that the caricatures and exaggerations of the peculiarities of the president would soon be forgotten, and that his name would be honored like that of Washington.

The surgeon on duty with the ship Congress, in the terrible fight with the rebel ram Merrimac, in Hampton Roads, upon his return

from a cruise in the Mediterranean, after the war, told me that he was not only surprised, but gratified, to find in several restaurants in Italy the likeness of Abraham Lincoln.

The words of Paterculus, the historian of the time of one of the Cæsars, relative to a distinguished man of his century, can be aptly applied to him of whom we have spoken: "His distinctive characteristic was this, that he was preceded by none whom he imitated, nor did any come after who could imitate him."

A poet, before Mr. Lincoln's death, well portrayed his future reputation in the following lines:

"No adulation shall the poet bring,  
 No o'erwrought picture of thy excellence;  
 But taught by truthfulness shall simply sing  
 The passing worth of cheerful common sense;  
 Shall call thy honesty a priceless gem,  
 Thy patience beautiful, thy faith sublime;  
 Thy gentle nature let the harsh condemn,  
 Just Heaven's reward is in the hand of Time;  
 Work on amidst the nation's wild turmoil,  
 The day of triumph brightens up the sky,  
 The tree of peace springs up from roots of toil,  
 Its leaves shall sweetly crown thee by and by.  
 Smile on amid thy cares, O Freedom's friend,  
 The people's heart is with thee, to the end."

















